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Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

Visitor Information

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INTRODUCTION

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, 7.3 million hectares (18 million acres) in northeastern Alaska, is one unit among 400 in the National Wildlife Refuge System. Redesignated and enlarged by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of December 1980, the Arctic Refuge is a vast and diverse area offering a variety of recreational activities associated with wildlife and wilderness.

For those planning a trip to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, trip preparation will be an important aspect of your visit. With proper planning, your trip will be unique and enjoyable, and will leave the natural qualities of the Arctic Refuge undisturbed for future visitors. Because of the fragility of the arctic and sub-arctic ecosystems recreational users need to be especially careful to have minimal impact on the land. You will need to be prepared for total self-sufficiency for the duration of your trip.

ACCESS

The only means of access to the Refuge is by air. Commercial air service is available from Fairbanks to the villages of Fort Yukon, Arctic Village, and Kaktovik (Barter Island), which are the usual jump-off points for Refuge visitors. Charter air taxi service is available in all three villages; charter service should be prearranged whenever possible. Private aircraft are permitted in the Refuge but the construction of airstrips is not allowed. The use of a helicopter requires a Special Use Permit from the Refuge Manager. Once you've arrived at your destination within the Refuge, travel options include hiking and boating; off-road vehicles are not permitted.

TRAVEL ROUTES

Much of the intrigue and adventure in exploring the Arctic Range lies in choosing your own travel route. You will find no marked trails so your choice of routes is unlimited. No matter what type of trip you are planning, good maps are essential. Topographic maps are available from the U.S. Geological Survey at a scale of 1:250,000, and, for some areas, at the 1:63,360 scale. Note that the magnetic declination varies from 31 to 35 so compensation will be needed when using a compass.

Your route plan and length of stay should be left with a reliable person. Don't forget to notify them on your return.

CAMPING AND BACKPACKING

Camping is permitted throughout the Refuge. Without designated campsites you are free to choose a site to meet your own needs. Campsites on sand or gravel bars provide well drained and durable sites, usually with fewer mosquitoes. Vegetation in the arctic grows very slowly; if you choose a tundra campsite watch carefully for signs of trampling and trails that may occur in only a few days. Camp should be moved when this happens to give vegetation a chance to recover.

Use of gas or alcohol stoves is recommended. Wood supplies in some places are scarce or non-existant. Wood accumulates very slowly in arctic regions and can be quickly depleted. The preferred location for a fire is on a gravel bar. Leave the area as you found it by removing bits of foil from the firespot, scattering ashes, and returning rocks to their original locations. High water will then erase all signs of your presence and people will not be artificially attracted to camp in the same place.

Backpacking routes along river drainages provide somewhat easier hiking although crossing small creeks and braided rivers almost always results in wet feet. Water levels can rise rapidly after rain and in glacial streams following warm temperatures. River crossings should be made in the upper part of river drainages and early in the day when water levels are often lowest. A safety rope may be necessary. Take day hikes on the same side of the river as your camp or evening may find you separated from your tent by a torrential stream.

HUNTING AND FISHING

The Refuge is open to hunting and fishing under applicable state and federal regulations. State hunting and fishing licenses are required. Information on state regulations and licenses is available by writing the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, 1300 College Road, Fairbanks, Alaska 99701. Dall sheep, moose, caribou and bear are hunted. Northern rivers contain grayling and char, and lakes and rivers on the south side support grayling and some pike.

WEATHER

The weather in the Refuge is unpredictable. Snow showers can occur at any time and place, but days can be very warm in June and July. Mountain lakes are usually ice-free by mid-July. South slope lakes are usually open by mid-June. Frost is not uncommon in August and by early-August autumn turns the tundra scarlet. Nearly continuous daylight makes 24-hour travel possible during most of the summer.

SUPPLIES

Food and other equipment are readily available in Fairbanks. Some supplies may be available on a limited or emergency basis in the villages, but travelers should not depend on obtaining last minute supplies there.

RUNNING RIVERS

Many rivers in the Refuge are suitable for travel by canoe, kayak or raft. All of them can be dangerous and difficult depending on the water level. Rainfall, temperature, and other weather factors can change water levels very rapidly, and consequently river trips are very unpredictable. All rivers are icy cold, and life jackets should have pockets to carry waterproof matches, candles, insect repellant and other survival gear.

North slope rivers, flowing to the Beaufort Sea, tend to be very swift and rocky. They are usually free flowing by mid-June and will be high and silty for several weeks depending on weather. Skill with rafts or kayaks is recommended for north slope rivers. Wet suits provide an added margin of safety. By mid to late July the sea ice along the coast is generally broken up enough to permit travel in the lagoons of the Beaufort Sea.

South slope rivers, part of the Yukon River drainage, are usually free flowing by early June. Water levels are usually high throughout June and by mid-August may be quite low. Some south slope rivers are suitable for canoes although collapsible kayaks or rafts are more easily transported by light aircraft. Riverboats are used on the Porcupine River.

SOME HAZARDS

Adequate equipment, knowledge and care reduces the potential for hazardous situations on your trip in the Arctic. Some particular things of which to be aware:

•Glacier crossings should be attempted only with proper mountaineering equipment.

•Brown (grizzly) bears are present throughout the Refuge. You can help prevent a conflict by announcing your presence with loud talking or singing, and by keeping a clean camp. Camp away from game trails and cook and eat away from your tent. Do not bury *any* debris and pack out your litter or you may cause problems for the next visitor by creating a "campground bear".

•Some cases of giardiasis, an intestinal disease caused by the microorganism *Giardia lamblia*, have been reported in northern Alaska. As an extra precaution you may wish to boil or purify your drinking water.

•Mosquitoes are most numerous in June and July. Carry adequate supplies of repellant and a mosquito net or tent for sleeping. Mosquito headnets may also be useful.

WILDLIFE VIEWING

You will probably see more wildlife if you travel at "night", or watch early in the morning and in the evening. Most wildlife are inactive at midday. Hiking over small hills or to vantage points along a river and stopping to watch quietly will increase your chances of seeing wildlife.

DO NOT DISTURB

There are numerous ancient camps on the Refuge. Stop and wonder who these people were and why they were here, then leave the site undisturbed for others to discover and enjoy as you have. Many of these sites hold a great deal of significance for the local people and their feelings should be respected. There are also private cabins on the Refuge. Although they are left open for use in emergencies in the true Alaskan spirit, they are private property and should be respected as such. Something removed from a cabin could mean the difference between life and death to someone else next winter.

MORE INFORMATION

We sincerely hope that you enjoy your trip to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. In large measure it is you who will determine by your regard for the land whether the unique wilderness qualities that you have experienced will be maintained for the enjoyment of those who follow you. Make demands on yourself and not on the land.

The Refuge staff is always happy to assist you in your planning, and would appreciate an opportunity to talk with you before or after your trip. If you need further information please contact:

Refuge Manager
Arctic National Wildlife Refuge
Rm. 266, Federal Building and Courthouse
101 12th Avenue, Box 20
Fairbanks, Alaska 99701
(907) 456-0250

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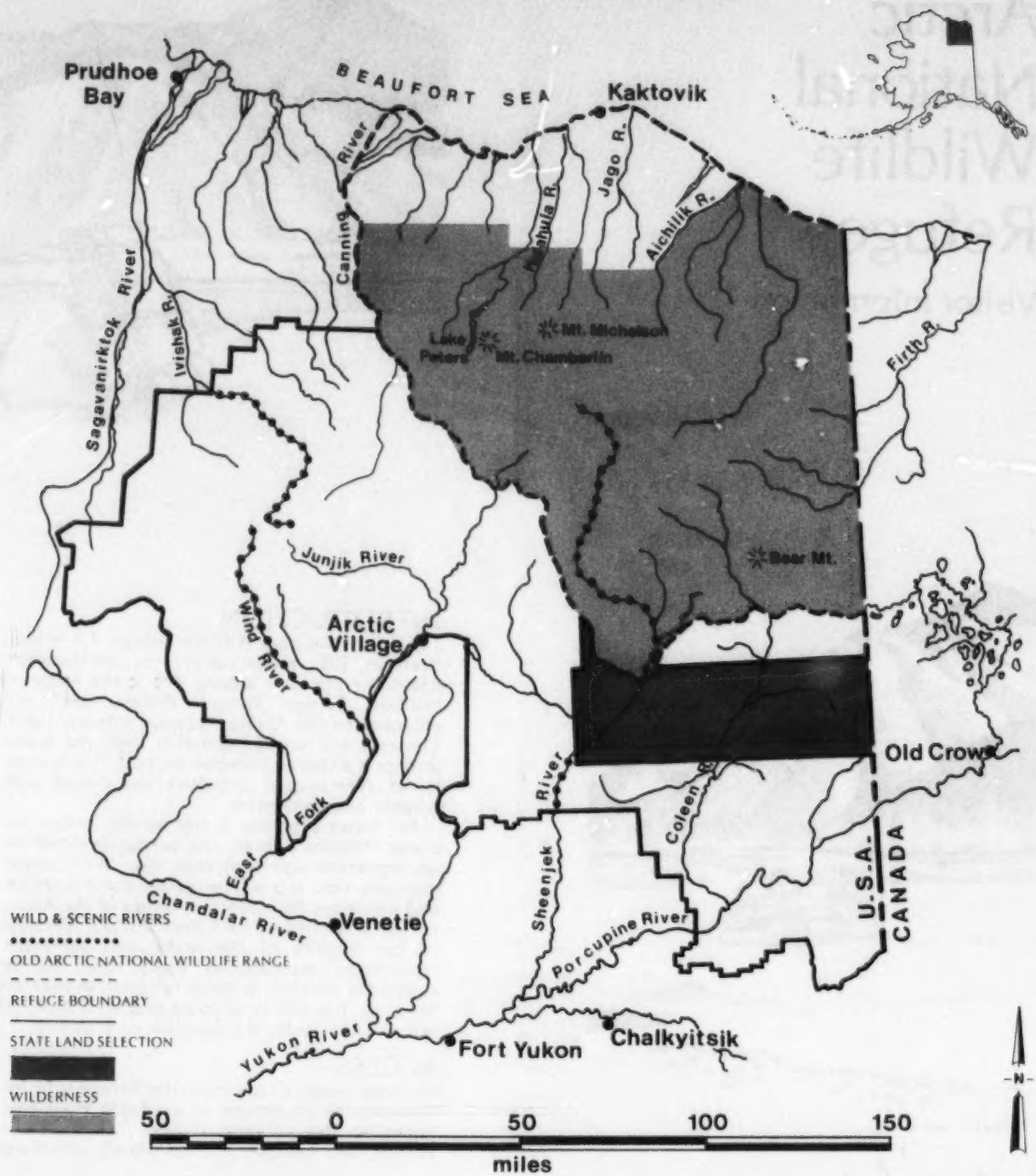

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OF THE INTERIOR
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The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing all our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States — now and in the future.